

Wood and Metal

by Backroads

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Summary: Title change. Camicazi is determined to commit a burglary to be sung of in sagas.

1. The Trader

It would come of no surprise to anyone that Camicazi, heir of the Brutish Bog-Burglars, aimed to take on what most would consider the most maniacal goal in the tribe's history. While she wasn't the type of girl to sit down and methodically write out every detail in plan she had been since childhood the type of girl to dream big.

The idea originated with word from a trader, a Peacable merchant of impressive stamina—perhaps the reason the Bog-Burglars did not immediately kill him on sight. Non-Bog-Burglars, especially men, had to earn a certain regard in order to survive in their particular islands. A combination of his wares and tales were enough to keep him from death, out of prison, and as a guest of Chief Bertha. Camicazi had drawn herself away from her traditional hour of sword practice to place herself on the floor of her mother's hut, eyes wide as she listened to the trader's tale.

The trader was a large man, used to hard work and lots of sun, with a non-ugly face and a certain spark to his smile. Camicazi wondered if he realized he was being analyzed as a potential semen donor. If he did, he did not appear to mind, but laughed and joked with the women in a disgustingly flirtatious manner as he spread his wares before them. The usual a trader might bring about—and that not-so-usual. Amongst the mix of jewelry and knives, herbs and belts, were items of extreme peculiarity. Camicazi told herself naivety was no excuse to jump to conclusions about anything and what could a Barbarian girl possibly know of the other lands to the east, but she was in no uncertain terms impressed with the objects for which she had no words.

"You seem to be the type of ladies who would prefer a good sharp

blade over jewelry" the trader said in his sugary tone as he made a show of removing the baubles"the protests he surely expected came quickly enough, and he put the jewels back with an apologetic smile. A smart move. Whatever façade Big-Boobied Bertha put up was not strong enough to hide her desire for the thick strands of pearls. "My mistake. Perhaps, then, I could show you what is currently fashionable on the Continent"

Women swarmed to be instructed on how not to embarrass themselves, stylistically-speaking, in front of women they would never see, but Camicazi kept her attention on the stranger items. If she wanted a necklace or a pair of earrings she would snatch them before the trader left"the man would be lucky if he left the island with any exchange for his wares. Jewelry could be stolen anytime, but these

.these, she did not even know how to describe. Small enough to fit in her palm, fashioned of wood and metal, intricate down to the tiniest detail and screaming to burst apart into far too many pieces if she dropped them. She did not even notice when the trader had turned his attention to her.

"Bought those off quite the craftsman, young miss."

She stared up at him. She was not quite sixteen, hardly ready to take her place as chief, yet still had the right to slash the head, for the pure fun of it, off of anyone who addressed her without permission. Considering that she had never taken anyone's life yet, it was rather a pity she was more interested in the objects. "What are they?"

He shrugged, seeming all the happier in the action. He was a true trader, bartering in the strange and unusual. Camicazi could respect that. "I haven't the foggiest idea. I paid an arm and a leg for them and have so far more than made my gold back. Up and down the coast, all through the islands these odd little beauties have fascinated all."

Well, they had certainly managed to capture Camicazi's attention for more than few minutes"and that was hard to do. "They're not from Rome, are they?"

The trader laughed good, long, and hard. "Hardly the Roman's style, are they?"

If it weren't Bog-Burglar, it might as well be Roman. But her curiosity was piqued. She would have to pickpocket one later. "I like them."

"I suppose I could let you have them for ten gold coins. I'm out of my mind for making that offer, but I was not brought up to give disdain to hospitality."

She smiled at him like the moron he truly was. "We don't have gold this far west."

"Supplies, then. That storm blew me terribly off course."

She supposed her mother would be gracious enough to set the man up with a few provisions. So far the peace was good. Then again, what

did Peacables bring but peace and plenty of fodder for rading?

He sat down next to her, legs folder for comfort, and plucked one of the objects up for an examination. His eyes, an astonishing blue, faded into memory. He was quite handsome. Camicazi wouldn't be surprised if her mother suggested she take him for fathering a daughter. Whatever about handsome, it was all disgusting. "I bought the bunch a little over a year ago, you see. Trading in the northeastâ€œ"

"The Continent?"

He shook his head. "That's what surprised me. We're isles folk here, all of us. We hold no grand illusions of ourselves. It's all for survival. This island, though, this one I couldn't find a month later. I had been on my usual route on a sunny day and there it was, only half a day's travel out. I figured I had never noticed it before and didn't think much more."

Now Camicazi's interest was completely on the trader's. She did love a good story, and it seemed fitting that a mysterious island would be in a good story.

"My men docked and we went ashore. Keep in mind here there was nothing the least bit strange about the folks on this island. The dialect was easy to pick up, their dress and habits not dissimilar from any of us. It was all normal. Many of them liked what I had, I made some solid and respectable deals. A good trade day, all things considered."

So much for interested. Camicazi didn't care one whit about the life of a trader. She fidgeted slightly and looked back at the object in her hands, hoping once again for a good story.

The trader didn't seem to care even if she were listening. "Then an old man came to me. He liked some of my furs and medicine. I asked him what he had to trade for them, like I always do. He smiled and asked me to follow him. We left the village and wandering deep into the island's forests. He lived apart from the rest of the village, he explained. Too much distraction in the community for him to focus properly. His house was as normal a house as you could ask for. At least on the outside. But when it opened upâ€œ| He paused, savoring the anticipation as if he were the listener.

"Things like I had never seen in there."

"You'll have to do a better job at describing them than that," Camicazi said.

He laughed and shrugged again. "I can't. Like a blacksmith's shop gone all kinds of wrong. Big, loud, lots of metal. Then these little oddities, sitting all neat-like on your average workman's table. We did our trading and the tale ends with you and me."

Camicazi did like the way the little object felt in her hands. She liked the bits of wood and metal, how seamlessly they fit together. She did not have the mind nor patience for any kind of smithry, but she knew when to impress and when to let the mild seeds of a plan sprout in her mind. "Did he have anything else?"

"Oh, yes. Much bigger things." The trader spread his arms out wide. "Nothing I wanted to drag back across the island to my ship. I told myself I would return later, make a bargain, sell high and retire early. Butâ€" his voice lowered there. "I never found the island again."

And that was when Camicazi set her goal. She would find the strange island, rob the workshop blind, and return to her home a hero.

* * *

><p>"It will be my Burgle-Bane," she told her mother the next morning at breakfast. "I will take everything this mysterious crafter has ever built and I will bring it back here and present myself to the tribe as one of them."<p>

Her mother was all kinds of impressed and all kinds of worried. That was what Camicazi dealt with as the daughter of the chief. Bertha prided herself on every madcap stunt pulled by any woman in the tribe including her only daughter, but on the same token was prevented by maternal instincts from wanting any possible harm to come to that precious daughter. "And that's all well and goodâ€"if this place actually exists."

"It does," Camicazi assured her. "Those things had to come from somewhere."

Bertha held out her hand and studied the silver bracelet she had traded two chickens forâ€"actually traded. "The dumb man also told us stories of metal ships from the sky and draugr. I wouldn't believe a thing he says, dear."

"Just because you haven't seen them, Mother, doesn't mean they don't exist."

"Terrible use of logic."

Camicazi laughed. "You always ways logic is a terrible use of time."

"It is. But your example is even worse."

Camicazi studied her mother. It was nearly impossible to imagine they were related. The blonde hair was the same, but they had both given up hope that Camicazi would be anything larger than she was now, a skinny slip of a thing not even five feet tall. Her mother had well passed six feet at the same age and had reportedly torn a sheep in halfâ€"according to further legend the main source of strife with the Uglithug tribe. Even so, tradition was tradition and Camicazi had to take her place as head of the tribe one day. "How can you ever expect me to be a great chief if I can't even commit a proper burglary?"

Bertha rolled her eyes and pushed herself up from the table. Her massive form all but filled the room. "Oh, you've done plenty of burglaries and I'm very proud of you. Chiefs had come to power with less. I'm still receiving flack for your dragon-napping moments. I don't know if Berk realizes half of what you've taken. You're sitting on the personal chair of Stormgale's and she's my second-in-command!"

Camicazi beamed and gave the chair's leg a good kick for good measure. "Yet none of those are worthy to be my Burgle-Bane and you know it."

Her mother bit her lip and frowned deeply. The expression made Camicazi squirm with joy. She was getting to her mother. Oh, but she was getting to her mother.

"It's clear out of the Archipelago, from what you've told me. All the way to the eastâ€¦ it's approaching storm season, you'll be thrown against the rocks."

"I'll be sure to stay in Odin's Bathtub."

"But there are so many Sharkworm currents. I don't know what they have to the east."

"Haven't you been that far?"

Bertha's face went so white that it was all Camicazi could do to refrain from cheering.

"Mother?"

Bertha gave the table a mighty shove that sent the milk spilling, then began to pace the room.

"You haven't, had you!" Camicazi leapt from her chair, all but screeching in joy. "You have never been so far to the east!"

"The Archipelago has plenty of burglary needs for anyone," Bertha said sharply. "Never been a reason to go so far."

"Has anyone in the tribe?" Camicazi pulled her knives from her belt two at a time, checking with expert vision for flaws. Sharpenings would be in order.

"No Bog-Burglar has ever left the Archipelago. Your grandmother has raided the Peaceable Country and that's that."

"Peaceable-smeaceable." Camicazi pulled out her favorite knife and flung it into the wall, barely missing her mother's arm. "My journey will be legendary."

"Legendary, indeed," Bertha muttered. "I take it your mind is made up, then? You couldn't just snatch a dragon from Berk or something?"

No, she could not. Her mind was made up.

* * *

><p>It was difficult to say what attracted to her to the idea. She hadn't ventured from the Bog-Burglar islands in months. Perhaps she had grown restless in the time. Camicazi had never been content to say long in any one place. The tribe had its steady women, the defensive soldiers happy enough to remain on the island protecting it from counter raids while Bertha and her warriors were away. There

were even the women who found delight in domestic things. Baking bread, mending clothes, making clothes. To be truthful, the majority of the Bog-Burglars spent most of their lives running the village. Burglary was a necessary part of life, a convenient way to secure supplies. Did not the goddesses care for the family and battle as well? Why should they be any different?

Maybe Camicazi was different. All she ever wanted to do involved just that doing. A sword in her hand, the wind in her face, and all of her far off from this pathetic little island.

Generations before, when the old village in the Peaceable Country was demolished and their menfolk killed in the raids, there had been nowhere else to go. A bunch of women with an assortment of children and babies were in no position to claim more land of their own. Yet they certainly were not going to go bawling and begging to other villages.

The islands were a smattering of marshy land and not many trees, but with something of an establishment, forts visited now and then by other tribes of the Archipelago, never intended to be permanent. They were ugly and the land was hard, so no one really cared when a rag-tag group of women took it over to give their brats a place to sleep.

They probably cared now. The Bog-Burglar was a tribe to reckon with.

But that didn't mean Camicazi had to like the land. She strode from her house and stared at the flat swamp that defined the islands. She had seen the other villages in the Archipelago, the strong fortresses, the impressive arrangement of buildings. Here the house of the chief was just another hut among many, patched to defend against the constantly creeping bog. Not a single hill or rock towered highly enough to decorate the landscape, leaving the view as merely earth, sky, and sea the patchy spread of the Archipelago and the Sullen Sea to the east and the endless expanse of the ocean to the west. They really were on the edge of the world here.

Well, now wasn't the time to be wondering and worrying about that. Camicazi was not made for wondering and worrying about things more than necessary.

She had a ship to find and outfit.

* * *

><To be continued.<

2. Shark Baiters

The Shark-Baiters had never as much as appeared on any map that Camicazi had ever. Of course, Camicazi never bothered with maps and much less anything that had to do men. But they were kin, as far kinship sort of matters went, and Camicazi had always been taught that one should not be too horrible to a man when there was something that one needed or wanted. The Shark-Baiters's island was settled to the south, a good scream's distance from her own. There was occasional communication, both out of necessity and pleasure, and

both tribes knew an outsider attack on one tribe meant troubling both. Kinship and partnership worked that way.

She took a rowboat over the gap, one forgotten to the fisherwoman, one that no one would miss, and within minutes had landed on the Shark-Baiters' island. She hopped from the boat, her stomach already prepared for the sensation of the island under her feet. It was not covered in the usual sand or soil of every other home in the Archipelago, at least not entirely. The waves echoed up through the island's ground surface like they would through the bottom of a boat. Without waiting to ponder it she marched forward, enjoying the vibrations beneath her. Aught but a tree decorated this island—in fact, nothing strong at all but their best offerings of men. Out of the corner of her eye she looked to the south. Pure ocean blocking whatever lay elsewhere. And no men fishing that way today.

A few men were about, repairing the island by laying down the wooden beams stolen from destroyed ships. They looked up in suspicion as she approached, eyes watching with the question of just what Princess Camicazi was doing here. She supposed it had been months since she had set foot on this place.

At last one approached her. A big man—all the Shark-Baiters were as big as could be expected—neither tribe bothered to keep 'round a male who was not. Not this far west. She didn't know his name, of course, nor cared. "Camicazi," he said simply.

She looked up at him, sure to meet his eyes. Tiny as she was, he was still but a man. "I need a ship."

He laughed, a deep thunderous sound that in wonder did not crack his ribs. "Another woman comes knocking on our doors for her seafaring needs. Tell me, are you all too great with child?"

She considered kicking him, one swift leg-punch to the groin. She had yet to fathom how Shark-Baiters could be so disparaging of women. But as they were there was no question on the nature of the two tribes living together or not. A Bog-Burglar would never give up acknowledgement of superiority. "Shut up your male mouth and take me to my father before I break your sorry excuse for an island."

The man, still laughing, managed a nod and gestured her to follow. Which she did, silently and furiously. She'd make sure this particular man would never father another daughter.

"The island is growing bigger," the man said proudly as soon as he apparently no longer felt like laughing. "We're expanding to the south. A few more ship raids and we will have all the wood we need."

Camicazi mumbled something breathlessly in response, but could not keep her eyes from the edges of the island. Past the rag-tag assembly of huts the island did seem to have grown from the last time she had visited.

"At least men can build an isle from nothing."

Good job, she thought with some disgust.

At long last she arrived at her father's hut. The shack was merely

that, a small thing, but according to Shark-Baiter tongue no true man really wanted to hide in a shelter when he should be out braving the elements. Every building on the island was as makeshift as the island itself. Without a word of thanks she shoved open the door. "Dad?"

No answer.

"He's out back." Another irritating deep laugh.

She rolled her eyes, considered again a groin kick, and stomped to the back of the hut.

Her father saw her first. He had a shark stretched out between a couple of poles, all kinds of fish juice dripping into a trough as his bone knife skimmed over the thick shark skin. With a mere turn of his head he glanced at her, hand and knife moving all the while.

"Hi, Dad!" she said sweetly. Her father was one of the few men she could tolerate, even respect. Her mother had certainly picked a fine one in finding a father for her daughter and heir.

"My own heart!" he declared. In a single moment the knife scraped a large load of skin from the shark then flashed back to his belt where five other identical knives waited. In another single moment he had her in his arms and right up above his head, which was no joking matter. He was a large man, of course, the largest and most powerful of the Shark-Baiters. True enough, neither Shark-Baiter or Bog-Burglar bothered to keep around a male who wasn't up to a few tough jobs, but her father Seasblood was terrifying huge, bigger even than Bertha. His hair was light brown, grown pale from years under the harsh northern sun, hardly a shade different from his weathered skin. He was covered in scars and burns, battle souvenirs from sealife and seafarers alike; the Shark-Baiters kept themselves busy that way. The most impressive was a missing chunk of flesh where his right shoulder should have been. Camicazi had yet to be told that story.

She tolerated the childish toss in the air, even enjoyed it, though it was over almost as soon as it began. Neither tribe was much for superfluous displays of affection.

"So," Seasblood said, returning her to the ground, "what is the nature of this joyous occasion?"

She looked up at him, making sure to meet his eyes with all the seriousness she could summon. "I'm looking for someone to father a daughter."

She did so much like the way his eyes bugged out of his head.

"You're not even sixteen years of age yet."

She shrugged and nodded and made her way over to the shark's body, where she wrapped her finger around a flap of skin for study. "So? In the east, even on the continent, that doesn't matter. Proper marriages are made, nice and early."

"Women are all but useless there," he said with a snort.

She narrowed her eyes.

"Don't expect me to give much praise to your tribe, Camicazi, but we'll keep our peace and you keep yours. No man on my island will be yours until you've proved yourself. Your Burgle-Bane is completed, I doubt it."

"I choose not to bother with such things."

"You're not even accepted into that silly tribe yet."

At that point she could keep a straight face no longer. She burst out laughing and after a few moments of shock Seasblood joined in as well.

"A ship," she said when she had regained control. "All I want is a ship."

The relief in his face was even more than she had expected. "A ship. Smart girl, you are. Not going to bother with one of those crummy ships your mother's people makes, are you?"

She shook her head. Pride in the Bog-Burglars be damned, she wanted a true seafarer's boat. "I want one of yours, of course. In this case I'll tolerate something a man has to make."

He did not seem to be offended. "For your Burgle-Bane, then?"

She nodded. "I'm setting out as soon as I have a ship."

"And what makes you think I'm going to give a shrimp girl like yourself one of my ships? What makes you think I'm going to put one of my beauties in the hands of a female?"

She put forth her best smile. As useless as men could be and as strange and twisted the relationship with them she was beginning to understand just how to work with them. "Because, Dad, it's me. Camicazi."

He laughed, and Camicazie realized he was merely keeping the ship back from her for his own amusement. "I'll give you a ship, then, if you promise not to destroy it in your idiotic ways of women."

"Any woman can properly handle a ship!"

He rolled his eyes at that comment. "Sure they can. Sure they can take a tubby boat and make it float between a few islands, but I bet none of your tribe has done much more than that."

"I just might."

"Open ocean darker than any of the seas in the Archipelago. No woman can handle that stretch of nothing." Seasblood continued laughing, his wide chest shaking with each gasp. "Come."

The dead shark behind them, Camicazi followed her father from the island's center down to its makeshift dock where four of the Shark-Baiters' ships waited. She had seen the men's work a few times before, but never so close and it was hard to fight back the spark of

envy igniting deep inside. Her mother had always mocked the men's ships, called them nothing but too much attention to things that don't matter, but Camicazi was more than certain one of those could survive the journey she intended to take. Though the men had their larger ships, crafts meant for half-determined expeditions, these were of the smaller variety, hardy vessels meant for small-but-tough crews, the kind with more bravery and attitude than their size suggested. Camicazi liked them immediately.

"What is a tiny thing like you plotting for her Burgle-Bain?" Seasblood asked as he stopped on the dock just before the first boat.

"It's a secret."

"Women are always full of secrets," he muttered under his breath. Louder, he continued "I hope that means something saga-worthy and not some suggestion you have no idea what you're doing."

"I'm sure you'll love it, Dad. I might even let you see what I bring back."

"More useless trinkets? Does your kind do anything but steal pretty things?"

She shook her head. "A Bog-Burglar never misses a chance to steal."

Seasblood hopped into the first boat, touched and rapped on its various parts, then hopped right back out with a shake of his head. "Onto the next one."

Camicazi wondered if he planned on giving her a good ship or the worst one, something he wouldn't miss. It would be just like a man to do the latter. Ah, well, if her father pulled a stunt like that she would just return later and steal exactly what she liked. "A trader came by last night."

"Let me guess. You took all of his wares and his clothes and one of your mother's soldiers is siring a son off of him right as we speak."

Camicazi didn't think so. "But if someone is, it's going to be a daughter."

"Bah."

She would never understand why the Shark-Baiters preferred sons. "He had some really interesting things. You can't even imagine them."

Seasblood now examined the third boat. "I can imagine a lot of things, Camicazi. Things your tribe would never even bother with. Once found a squid that had swallowed an entire human skull."

That did sound pretty cool. "This guy had stuff he had made."

"Made?" Her father lifted his head, his eyebrows raised and impressed. "The trader made it."

"Well, that someone else had made. Here, look." She fished the little wood-and-metal object from her pouch and walked down to the third ship. "Have you seen anything like it before?"

Seasblood stared at the object, his eyes now narrow. He stared so long Camicazi thought he would shoot fire from his eyes and set the little thing on fire. "No."

She beamed. "That's what I'm going to do for my Burgle-Bane. I'm going to find the island where these were made, still hundreds of them, and bring them back to prove myself the greatest burglar in the Archipelago."

"Even greater than whomever stole the shield of Grimbeard whatever-his-name-was?"

"Yep. Speaking of which, I need to return home and snatch that up. I figure it will come in handy."

"Against rogue Vikings and Outcasts?"

She made a face. "Nah, I just think it would look awesome attached somewhere on the ship. Sort of totem for me, you know."

That drew quite the look from her father, one she couldn't decide to be of pride or bewilderment. She decided she did not want to think much about it and picked pride.

"You plan on nailing up the legendary shield of Grimbeard the Ghastly?"

"Sure. Why not?"

He shook his head in what was clearly disgust and picked up the little object. "Back to this, then. No, I have never seen one of these, but I have heard about it."

"What?" She tried to snatch the object back but her father simply was too tall for her. "You're telling me that other people besides me have seen things like this?"

"Did you really think you were the center of the universe, Camicazi?" Seasblood took the opportunity to poke and prod at it with his gnarled fingers. "Did you really think the sun revolved around you and not the rest of the earth?"

She folded her arms over her chest, rather put-out.

"Automatonic," he said at last, returning the object to her. "At least, I think that is what they are called."

"That's the most ridiculous long word I've ever heard. I refuse to repeat it."

"All right. I think this ship here will suit your needs. If you don't bring it back we will be storming after it."

She gave the object another once-over with her eyes and stuck back into her pack. "What doesâ€| whatever you saidâ€| do?"

Seasblood was back on the boat. "I don't know. Moves."

"Odin's beard, lots of things move."

"It moves by itself."

She still was not impressed. "So does a boat. So do leaves. You can say that about any animal or human."

"But it's not an animal or human. Ever seen a rock move by itself?"

"Yes. I saw one roll down a hill once." Great. The object was even less interesting than she had expected. That worship had better have something worth its salt and more importantly her time.

"So why do you want to steal these?"

"Becauseâ€|" She no longer had an idea. "Because they are far away and no one on my island has seen them before. That's why."

That seemed to satisfy him. "All right, then. Your ship is ready, my dear."

"Wonderful." She hopped onto the boat. It seemed as sturdy as she could expect a Shark-Baiters' ship to be. Oh, this was going to be fun. "How do I work it?"

"You'll need a second person."

Camicazi sighed. A second person to hang around her. Ah, well. She supposed she could swing over to Berk and see who was willing to be dragged into one of her schemes.

"Your brother will be coming with you," her father continued.

Her eyes flashed to her father as her mouth fell open. At that moment she might as well have been on a burning pyre for how the boat felt beneath her. "You can't be serious."

Her brother was SeasSweat and he was her twin. The union had thus satisfied both Bertha and SeasBlood. Each had an heir in one go. Perfect. Not that Camicazi particularly cared. SeasSweat was a boy, of all things.

"I'll come back tonight when you're asleep and take my ship," she declared.

"Suit yourself," SeasBlood said, turning back toward the island. "I wasn't aware you had become such an expert on sailing."

For a moment she wanted to throw something at him, but didn't.

Fine.

Camicazi wasn't sure why she tolerated the presence of SeaSweat. Though truth be told she did not spend much time thinking about it. She had her boat, she had a semblance of a plan, all would be well. She threw her bag of supplies into the boat, enjoying the sound it made striking the wooden bottom. Boy or no boy, she had a burglary to commit.

SeaSweat, speak of the demon, did not take long to appear. Their father had long since returned to his shark-skinning when a rather gangly blonde boy made his way over to the boat.

"Dad says I'm coming with you."

She tried to focus a moment of time to considering her pathetic acceptance of this arrangement, but there was no time. She had all she needed and she just wanted to get going. "Yup. He said I needed a slave and since you are blood or something semi-important like that you get to be the lucky victim."

SeaSweat was silent for a long time. He was as brown as any of the other Shark-Baiters, but rather than making him look tough like their father it merely made him look troubled, some orphaned youth washed up on a beach and forced to suffer. Even the muscles he had were unimpressive as they clung to bone like the meat on a chicken. His eyes were deep brown, the color of mud, and Camicazi prayed silent thanks that she was not cursed with such ugly eyes. Their blonde hair was the only sign they were twins.

"What?" Camicazi had her hand on the mooring rope, ready to release it as she ran through a minor list of necessities. "Did you forget how to talk? I guess it was foolish of me to forget how stupid boy Shark-Baiters were."

"I'm not your slave, Camicazi!" he shouted. His voice had not deepened into a man's yet, and it squeaked on "your" like a tiny girl's.

She laughed. "That's what Dad said."
>"He said no such thing."<p>

She examined the rope with her hands. A Bog-Burglar was always on the look-out for good rope. This wasn't bad. Apparently rope was important to Shark-Baiters. Apparently they used it make nets to catch fish or other such domestic nonsense. "Can you prove he didn't?"

SeaSweat frowned, his eyebrows furrowing.

She met his gaze with what she was pretty sure was an impish grin. Wow, boys were incredibly stupid. "Can you?"

"No, but I would swear on the one bloody eye of Odin that he didn't."

"Oohâ€|" Camicazi clucked her teeth. "Dragging the gods into this, are we? Isn't that a little sacrilegious?"

But now that frown was changing. It did become quite a smile, but it was thinking about such a thing. "Can you prove he said it?"

"Good response," she admitted. "I can't prove he said that, but I can't recall every exact word he bothered to say to me and I was only half-listening anyway, so there's a very good chance he declared you my slave."

"Shark-Baiters don't believe in slavery," he said firmly. He hopped deftly from the dock into the boat. His fear were bare, dirty, and looked like leather. Camicazi was impressed against her will.

"Neither do Bog-Burglars, but we don't believe in morals anyway." Figuring her brother was well-enough in the boat, she unhitched the rope. "Oh, dear. I forgot to tell you to go get supplies. You are going to starve and die of horrible infections and I won't be able to do a thing about it."

It soon became clear that SeaSweat was now ignoring her.

The boat drifted slightly, eager to leave the make-shift island. Just like how Camicazi felt.

SeaSweat muttered something under his breath that Camicazi did not quite catch.

"Speak up like a man. Except I forgot how weak men are."

He did not reply or repeat. He just tumbled over the side of the boat.

As much as she hated men and boys and pretty much anything male the sight of someone going right over the side of the boat was rarely a happy one and Camicazi hadn't even had the pleasure of pushing him. With a silent shriek she ran to the side.

"SeaSweat!" she called

The stupid blonde boy was swimming alongside the boat with a fish. Not only was he swimming, but he was moving himself to the stern.

"What are you doing, you male moron?"

He shot her a look that was one of the deadliest she had ever seen from a boy. Such an idiot. To think she had survived nine horrible months with him.

She repeated herself with a few more expletives.

Then the boat heaved forward and she fell to her knees. An attempt up only sent her back smacking to the wooden bottom. The boat was certainly moving with some speed.

By the time she was up to some reasonable standard of standing, SeaSweat was back in the boat, shaking water from his dripping hair. "The boat caught in some of the plants. We needed a proper launch."

"You could have warned me." She held up her elbow. She was slightly sure it was possibly bleeding under her clothes. "Look what you did!"

He looked, but made no expression.

"You might have made me bleed, that's what. It would be so like a boy to do that."

"I thought you were a tough Bog-Burglar."

"I certainly am and it hardly hurts, but it does not change the fact that you could have been a lot more careful in the presence of a girl." She slunked over the gunnell and leaned over it, arms crossed and ears ready. A Bog-Burglar always listened for signs of inconvenient approach and she was not going to let her brother of all people send her into the water.

Already the island of the Shark-Baiters was fading behind. The sails, painted a deep grey, filled with air and the boat moved forward at a nice pace. Though the direction was none in particular. Perhaps she should see about sailing this thing.

"So where are we going?" SeaSweat asked.

She sighed and made a point of making it sound miserable. "See? You're a slave. Dad would have explained everything to you if you were anything but."

"Why would he bother telling me the plans of a Bog-Burglar?" There wasn't any anger in his voice—hardly any expression. That voice of his was one thing she hated most about her brother. He did not know how to talk. Oh, he could form words and coherent sentences and all that stuff about language, but his voice was constantly flat. One would never be able to guess how he felt by listening to him talk. It was good he didn't talk all that much or people would be bored to death just by listening to him.

What a silly question. "Who wouldn't want to be privy to the plans of a Bog-Burglar?" She made sure to fill her voice with all the expression he had never used. "We're only the greatest thieves in all the Inner Isles."

He was silent again, and Camicazi had the horribly strange sensation it was not impressed silence. "I assumed you needed the boat to go steal something."

"Ah." She stared down into the water. It was a nice day for this part of the sea. Blue water the color of glaciers, even a sight of a school of fish. 'Of course I would be stealing something, stupid. That's what Bog-Burglars do."

More silence. Why such silence? Everyone knew that females were much more conversational than males, but this was bordering on the ridiculous.

"What kind of fish are these?" she asked, gesturing at the school that slid past them in a silvery wave.

"Tasty kind."

"I've never heard of that kind. Do they taste good?"

A pause. "What are you stealing?"

She sighed. Men would never understand the art of burglary. "It doesn't matter precisely what I'm stealing. The fact is that I am doing it and it will be incredible and you get the honor of assisting me."

"But not as your slave."

Well, she had tried. Maybe someday she could convince someone to be her slave.

"Well, we have to pick some sort of goal, Camicazi. I haven't done a single thing to steer this boat and that is something we might want to think about it. We get caught in the summer current and that would be pretty much that for us."

She turned from the gunnell. "We're going east. Toward the continenet."

He did not look impressed. "You're going to rob a few Peaceables? Create havoc on the Island of the Quiet Life?"

"No, silly. Something much better." Now with a smile consuming most of her face she sat down cross-legged on the floor. "There is a disappearing island."

That sort of news should have impressed anyone, but SeaSweat did not seem to care. He nodded half-heartedly and made his way to the rudder. "East it is, then."

"Did you not hear what I said? A disappearing island."

"I heard you."

"As in an island that is only there sometimes."

"We Shark-Baiters can move our island anytime we want. I don't see what the big deal is. You pull the anchor and paddle the island anywhere you want. It's hardly anything to scream about."

"Yes, but if you look hard enough, you can always find the stupid Shark-Baiter island. It's a bunch of wood and plants. I could set it on fire. That would make it disappear in a hurry."

SeaSweat pulled the rudder toward him with pondering attention, like he had forgotten what such a thing did. "I bet if I looked hard enough I could find your invisible disappearing island of mystery."

"No you wouldn't." Camicazi gave the boat's floor a sharp rap. There was a fine echo, though she was not sure if that was good or bad. Ah, well. A Shark-Baiter boat was a Shark-Baiter boat and there was no sense in doubting her father. "Because it's not like your crummy old island. It's quite magical."

"But you're going to find it."

She nodded. The idiot was finally beginning to get it.

"How can you find it if no one else can?"

"Well, I haven't gotten to those kind of insignificant details of my brilliant plan quite yet, but you'll see. And I'll see. We will cross the bridge when we come to it, so they say."

SeaSweat fiddled with the rudder again. "I guess we are going east, then."

"East it is."

The days passed as briskly as days in a boat could. All two of them. Camicazi had beforehand imagined she would quickly grow bored, but the novelty of being in a boat for so long continued to stick to her. She practiced her sword fighting skills (not with her brother, she didn't think any man as shrimpy as him had ever picked up a sword—anyway, he did not appear to have brought one). She fought with him and chattered endlessly at him until he told her in his flat and boring voice to shut up. She even obeyed most of his boatcare and sailing instructions—she figured a Bog-Burglar had best be familiar with nautical objects if they were to be part of a burglary.

It seemed her Burgle-Bane was off to a fantastic start.

Then, on the morning of the third day, SeaSweat actually started a conversation.

"We had better be careful passing Hysteria."

"What?" She turned from the gunnel, where she had been throwing scraps of leather at passing seagulls, to stare at her brother. "Why should we be careful passing Hysterica? It's just an island. A big chunk of land and dirt. I don't think it's going to hurt you. Not even a Shark-Baiter."

He just blinked at her with his ugly muddy eyes. "Because of the Hysterics?"

"Hysterics." She puffed the word out with all the despicability she could muster. "You're afraid of the Hysterics?"

"Aren't you?" He didn't seem to be afraid of anything particular, though fear was difficult to spot with someone who expressed next to nothing when he spoke.

The large island was in solid, close view, its half-frozen shoreline glaring darkly at them over the water. They weren't that close, though. "No one gets to Hysteria without trying and I don't think the Hysterics are going to leave the island. What are you worried about? It's not winter, there is no ice thick enough."

"Currents," SeaSweat said with a shrug.

"Currents," Camicazi repeated. Oh, gods, this brother of hers was an idiot. "What do currents have to do with anything?"

"I'm not talking about the berries, half-wit." He could not even insult properly in that voice. "What if the current brings us closer to the island."

"Ridiculous. Never has happened."

"If it had happened, and the Hysterics had gotten someone and did to them whatever hysterics do, do you think anyone would have heard about it?"

That was enough to set Camicazi thinking, and she looked over towards the Island of Hysteria with a little more trepidation. "How long before we're clear of Hysteria?"

SeaSweat shrugged.

"Well, can't you make us go faster?"

He shook his head. He also looked incredibly bored by the conversation.

Camicazi marched over to the rudder, making sure her stomping made as much noise as possible. "How do you work this thing?"

"Don't touch that."

"Dad said I could." She grabbed hold of it and pulled hard.

The boat almost rolled. The keel all but spun laterally in the water and Camicazi was thrown to her knees. SeaSweat jumped over her and grabbed the rudder. "What did you do?"

"Do?" she shrieked. "I was just trying to keep us on course. I didn'tâ€¦" She took a deep breath. She hated it when she had no idea what she wanted to say. "I didn't do anything. The only way to get to Hysteria is to talk on ice. On rare hyperfrozen winters. Everyone knows that."

SeaSweat did not respond, but his face was red. Apparently his way of expressing fury.

The boat continued to jerk, like it were in a heavy swarm.

"I didn't mean to break it, SeaSweat."

"You didn't break itâ€¦ youâ€¦" He didn't finish.

Hysteria loomed closer.

Camicazi laughed. "I just discovered a new current."

"Great job," her brother muttered.

"Well, get us out of it so I can go get it named and mapped. Camicazi's Current. Or, Ze Great Camicazi's Current."

"Shut up." He pulled with all his miserable strength at the rudder.

The boat turned, but not enough.

It was only a few minutes later the boat touched shore.

4. Hysteria

"Fabulous," Camicazi said with every nugget of sarcasm she could muster. As she gave the boat a swift kick against the hull. "Just fabulous. So much for these incredibles boats your tribe is supposedly so talented at building. You know what I have to say about them? Failure. Complete failure. It's so good I didn't steal one. I should have just rolled my sleeves and built my own."

Her brother did not respond.

The idiot could not even respond to a baited insult. "SeaSweat, did you hear me?"

He nodded and hopped from the boat.

"And did you hear me insult your boat?"

He nodded again.

"And you're not going to say anything?"

He shrugged. "I didn't build that boat and you were the one that pulled us into the wrong current."

"The current I discovered. Heretofore named the Camicazi Current!"

SeaSweat was on shore now, looking out to the sea as if there were something that could possibly be important out there.

"Except I will never get to inform anyone of the current and its name because your boat is incapable of getting through the ocean."

"Can you please shut up? I'm trying to figure a way to get off the island?"

Camicazi felt the tiniest twinge of guilt. Yes, he was right. There was nothing more dangerous than being on the island of the Hysterics thought at the time they weren't exactly popping out everywhere to attack them. And maybe her brother was right and maybe she did some things she shouldn't have and maybe it was possibly partially her fault they were. Self-blame had never been one of her strongest suits. But she did like be helpul. "What do we need?"

"A paddle."

"A paddle?" she echoed incredulously.

He nodded. "So we can push through the currents a little better."

"Oh. I guess I was hoping for something a little more exciting. What does a paddle look like? I mean, you're the ship guy so you should be able to tell me these things."

"Something long and broad so we can push the water back."

Camicazi sighed and looked around the beach. It was bare and sandy and more than a little rocky. "I'm not seeing anything. I will head

further inland." Before SeaSweat could say anything she was, racing up hill toward the mess of rocks above.

Hysterica sure did not have much in the way of wood. The little forest they did have was sparse and straggly and even knowing her own bare home island she was unimpressed. No wonder the Hysterics were they way they were. Except none seemed to be about it. Which suited her just fine, though it would be cool to return not only wit all sorts of fancy machinery but with tales of fighting a Hysteric.

Yet no one seemed to be about. Just as well, she told herself.

She moved along the island. There did seem to be stronger forests inland at the island's center but they were miles away. She had a sudden urge to just let everything go and run and run until she had circled the entire island. Maybe the Hysterics weren't there. Maybe they had died off. Maybe she could be able to claim this entire island in the name of the Bog-Burglars. Maybeâ€|

Before she could think another thought, the steel edge of a blade appeared in front of her.

She skidded to a fault, the blade barely missing the tip of her nose.

Three monstrously huge Vikings towered above her. Their clothes were hodge-podge and they stank horribly and even their eyes couldn't focus. It was only because of that damned sword she could tell they knew where she was. She swallowed and moved for her own sword.

"Don't even think about using that, girly!" the owner of the threatening sword said. "Don't think about using it or you will find yourself without a head and that head will be rolling right down the path."

Even so she let her fingers rest lightly on her sword. "I'm not using it. I'm just touching it. See?"

"Don't think about doing anything else."

She sighed. She had never been very good at being threatened. "And just who are you?"

"Hysterics."

She rolled her eyes. "I mean, besides the obvious. I get that this is your island and this is the island known for housing the Hysteric tribe and that's probably why it is called Hysteria and all that, but let's take a nice breather for a moment and you can bother to tell me just who exactly you are what exactly you are going to do with me."

The men exchanged glances.

"Do you ever shut up?" asked one.

"Nope," replied Camicazi.

"We are Hysterics, as you observed," said the first Hysteric. "And we

want to know why you and that other spindly young chap docked your boat on our island. Our home. I believe many people refer to it as trespassing."

"We had no intention of trespassing on your ugly island. For all it's worth, I thought it was impossible to get here except when the sea freezes. But apparently there is this tiny little current that happens to go right past your island and on that we got caught."

"We want you off," said the third Hysteric.

"And I'll be happy to go as soon as you let me doing something besides touch my sword. I would be perfectly happy to get the paddle my brother so desires and leave."

"A paddle," repeated the second Hysteric. "You are asking for a paddle."

"Yes. Did I not make myself clear?"

The sword was slowly pulled away and in a moment Camicazi had her own in hand and between her and the Hysterics. "I don't want to use this but I will if I have to!"

"You won't if you promise to leave!"

"Fine." She sighed. "I will." Then she stopped.

It was probably an incredibly stupid idea and she probably should have realized that when she was thinking of it. But she knew of the Hysterics, had dealt with them before, and some knowledge pertaining to them had managed to stick in her head.

Slowly, half-fearing it would be taken from her, she pulled the little automaton out.

The Hysterics, as she had anticipated, gasped.

Maybe her idea wasn't stupid. Maybe it was brilliant.

"Your leader," she said. "Norbert the Nutjob. Has he seen anything like this before?"

End
file.